

Chapter 32

Marketing E–Learning and the Challenges Facing Distance Education in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the marketing of e-learning and challenges facing distance education in Africa. While discussing the growing trend in distance education, this chapter also examines the socio-political and economic factors limiting its effectiveness on the continent. The conclusion of this chapter is that the crisis within the African state constitutes a hindrance to effective marketing and implementation of e-learning and distance education.

INTRODUCTION

Education, which used to be regarded as something that ended when one's working life began, will in this new era, according to James Martin and as cited by Thorvaldsen, go on throughout life because adult education will be of vital importance (Thorvaldsen, 1980, p.9). As he correctly speculated, the future will be characterized by an extremely rapid rate of change in which work and leisure activities will change. Many persons will learn two, three, or four careers in a lifetime

as telecommunications, automation and later machine intelligence will cause entirely different work patterns. And that electronics will create both the need and the tools for lifelong learning. In fact his speculation was rather cautious considering the world of today with satellite communications, cellular phones, computer technology, software and hardware and much more.

The new technology, according to Alexander and Boud, has transformed education the way it used to be and its impact is complete because it has changed the learner and what he or she is expected to learn and knowledge acquisition process. It has changed the teacher, the process

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1598-4.ch032

of instruction and his or her own learning process as well and finally transformed the environment within which this knowledge will be put to use. The change since 1980s has been steady with ever increasing capability provided by multi-media capable computers accompanied by a reduced cost. The rapid growth of the internet has added a new dimension to the entire process because it provides possibilities for high quality education in an investment and entrepreneurial friendly environment. Interestingly, the rise of the new technology seem to coincided with a crisis of confidence in traditional education and an increasing demand for higher and continuing education that have not been adequately met by traditional educational institutions (Alexander and Boud (2001p.3).

These observations, while they are true, continue to change as rapid and in tandem with the speed of technology. Our lives and societies are therefore been transformed but while the transformation within the process of learning and beyond might be true, it is imperative to establish the importance of education and its impact on societal development. And for the purpose of this paper, an attempt will be made to examine distance education in Africa since the marketing of the new technologies and the factors impacting the process thereof.

In our analysis, we will establish that the environment in the developing countries is an important variable in determining the success of distance education. It will also be established that, rather than reducing the global divide, the socio-economic and political conditions within which the process of distance education is taking place in Africa, widens the divide. In an effort to achieve these goals, this chapter will be divided and discussed under four themes; Distance education and E-learning; The Widening gap- the African experience; marketing distance education and; the Challenges facing distance education in Africa.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND E-LEARNING

Distance education started in the 1800s with individual pioneers using the latest technologies of the time such as the printing press and the post office, to reach distant students. The situation is no more different today whereby the technologies available are greatly enhancing the potential of distance education as well as the learner's experience. What has changed is the nature and speed of communication brought about by the technology in use. Distance education has transformed itself over the years by incorporating new technologies such as the radio and the television as well as the video, and more recently the computer, the electronic networks, the Internet, the world-wide-web (WWW), videoconferencing and satellite broadcasting. (Barbara Phillip, 2000). However, this transformation has not in any way changed the purpose of education in any of the societies of the developed and developing world.

According to Govinda Shrestha, the purpose of education remains the same, because "education has served as the main instrument for disseminating various accomplishment of human civilization and plays a crucial role in producing and transferring knowledge and skills in society" (Shrestha, 1997). The contribution of education to economic growth, the reduction of poverty and injustice and general awareness is well documented. And according to the World Bank, education is "essential for civic order and citizenship and for sustained economic growth and the reduction of poverty (World bank, 1995: xi). In fact, education is also seen as "one of the keys to social development and virtually every aspect of the quality of life" (ICPQL, 1996:170). This report by the Independent Commission for Population and Quality of Life (ICPQL) reaffirms the global acceptance of education as an important vehicle for social change and development.

As an extension of traditional education process therefore, distance education extends beyond

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